

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-10

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FM AMEMBASSY BRIDGETOWN

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1773

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRIDGETOWN 2247

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MARR, AC

SUBJ: RENEGOTIATION OF ANTIGUA MILITARY FACILITIES

REF: (A) BRIDGETOWN 2236; (B) BRIDGETOWN 2166

SUMMARY: GOA OFFICIALS WANT TO PUT FORTH THEIR VIEWS ON

SUBJECT, ALTHOUGH THEY FULLY UNDERSTAND THAT CONVERSATIONS ARE WHOLLY PRELIMINARY, INFORMAL, AND NON-BINDING. WE FACE A GROUP OF FRIENDLY, NEEDFUL ADVERSARIES, WHO ARE IN A WEAK BARGAINING POSITION ULTIMATELY. THEY ARE LOOKING FOR SYMPATHETIC EARS TO HEAR THEM PRESUMABLY OUTLINE THEIR PROBLEMS, AND PERFECT SHOPPING LISTS OF SOLUTIONS, WHILE TALKING RENEGOTIATION. ALTHOUGH RECEPTIVE, THE DEPARTMENT MAY BE POWERLESS TO RESPOND, AND AT SOME FUTURE DATE, WILL BE IN NEED OF SUBSTANTIAL INFORMATION FROM ITS MILITARY COLLEAGUES TO PROPERLY ADDRESS THE SUBJECT OF ANTIGUA AND BARBADOS, BEFORE DECEMBER 31, 1977. END SUMMARY

1. EMBASSY UNDERSTANDS INTERAGENCY MEETING WAS CONSIDERED, BUT CANCELLED, FOR NOVEMBER 18, TO PREPARE US POSITION REGARDING INEVITABLE RENEGOTIATION OF LEASES OF THE ANTIGUAN LANDS ON WHICH THE USG OPERATES ITS US NAVY FACILITY AND US AIR FORCE MISSILE TRACKING STATION. WHILE PREVIOUS BRIDGETOWN CABLES
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AND AIRGRAMS HAVE COMMENTED ON THE SUBJECT, THE FOLLOWING UP

TO DATE OBSERVATIONS ARE OFFERED FOR OUR DEPARTMENTAL COLLEAGUES. IT IS OUR ASSUMPTION, BASED ON ALL CONSIDERATIONS, THAT USG WISHES TO REWEAVE THE LEASE, THEREBY CONTINUING THE INSTALLATIONS. WE RECOGNIZE, FURTHER, THAT A QUID PRO QUO MAY BE NECESSARY, ALTHOUGH THE FORM, OR VALUE, MAY BE, AS YET, UNDETERMINED. OUR FURTHER ASSUMPTION IS THAT THE ANTIGUANS ARE BOTH DESIROUS OF OUR PRESENCE, AND CONTINUED OPERATION OF THE FACILITIES, WITH THE EXPECTATION THAT WE ARE AMENABLE TO PAYING SOME FORM OF CONSIDERATION FOR THEIR USE.

2. WE HAVE BEEN ADVISED THAT THE ANTIGUAN INFORMAL DISCUSSION GROUP (WE HAVE MADE THIS CLEAR) WILL CONSIST OF MIN PUBLIC WORKS-TOURISM E.E. WILLIAMS; MIN LEG AFFAIRS-ATTY GEN (SENATOR) COSMO O.R. PHILLIPS; ASSOCIATED STATES COMM. DR. LIONEL THOMAS; AND EXTERNAL AFFAIRS PERM SEC ERIC CHALLENGER. WHILE PREMIER VERE C. BIRD, SR., (AND HIS AIDE, MAJOR DENNIS GARDNER) WILL BE PRESENT IN DC, HE IS NOT EXPECTED TO SIT IN ON THE DISCUSSIONS, WHICH, HE UNDERSTANDS ARE INFORMAL, PRELIMINARY, AND NON-BINDING. PREMIER BIRD, WHO SIGNED THE 1961 AGREEMENT AS HEAD OF GOVERNMENT, IS WELL DISPOSED TOWARDS U.S., AND DESIRES AN EARLY AGREEMENT. HE HAS PERIODICALLY REMINDED US OF THE ASSISTANCE RENDERED THE USG BY ANTIGUA IN 1961, TO MAKE THE LEASE POSSIBLE. HE FONDLY RECALLS THE EXPRESSED GRATITUDE OF THE SECRETARY OF STATE, FOR ANTIGUA'S ASSISTANCE IN EXPEDITING ACQUISITION OF THE LANDS IN 1961. THE AFOREMENTIONED PARTICIPANTS, PRESUMABLY LED BY BOTH WILLIAMS AND PHILLIPS, ARE A FAIRLY SOCIAL AND REASONABLE GROUP, WHO MAY BE MORE INCLINED TOWARDS DISCUSSING OR PRESENTING SHOPPING LISTS OF THINGS, RATHER THAN OUTRIGHT PRICE, ALTHOUGH THE LATTER MAY BE MORE DESIRABLE TO THEM. MR. WILLIAMS WILL BE AWARE THAT THE MIN PUBLIC WORKS HAS BEEN GIVEN EXTENSIVE ASSISTANCE BY BOTH AIR AND NAVY FACILITIES IN AREAS OF ROAD GRADING, POND CLEANING, TRASH BURIAL, AND NAVIGATION AIDS LOANED TO COOLIDGE INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT, OFTEN SUPPLEMENTED BY TRAINED US TECHNICAL PERSONNEL. ATTORNEY GENERAL PHILLIPS IS NEW TO GOVT, BUT AS MINISTER RESPONSIBLE FOR POLICE, COAST GUARD, ETC. HE HAS VOICED NEED FOR ASSISTANCE (COAST GUARD VESSELS, MEDICAL EQUIPMENT, ETC) IN HIS AREAS. HE HANDLED RELEASE,/- 5 '73, OF A SICK US CITIZEN, VIETNAM VET GARY MARTIN, CONFIDENTIAL

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CONVICTED OF "MURDER BY REASON OF INSANITY," A SAD CASE WHICH TROUBLED US-GOA RELATIONS. HE WILL REMAIN THAT GOA IS STILL BURDENED BY MEDICAL EXPENSES OF POLICE CORPORAL R.A. NELSON JR., WOUNDED AND PERMANENTLY PARALYZED BY MARTIN'S WEAPONS. DR. THOMAS, A VETERINARIAN, HAS PERFORMED AS A GENERAL REPRESENTATIVE FOR GOA, THE MOST RECENT BEING HIS RENEGOTIATION OF AN EXPORT-IMPORT BANK LOAN AGREEMENT FOR FINANCIALLY PRESSED ANTIGUA. CHALLENGER IS A RESPECTED

AND HONORED PUBLIC SERVANT (IN THE VIEW OF BOTH RECENT GOVTS) WHO IS CURRENTLY REPRESENTING GOA IN ITS RELATIONS WITH ASSOCIATED STATES, IN PARTICULAR, AND CARICOM, IN GENERAL. OTHERS MAY LEAD THE DISCUSSION, BUT IT IS CHALLENGER THEY EVENTUALLY CALL UPON. THIS PRELIMINARY SESSION WILL LARGELY AFFORD THE GOA A HOME-SPAWNED OPPORTUNITY TO SHOW FORWARD MOVEMENT, ALTHOUGH A UNILATERAL ONE.

3. THE FACILITIES ARE VITAL TO THE GOA ECONOMY. TOGETHER, THEY CONSTITUTE A LARGE (BY GOA STANDARDS) EMPLOYER, THE NAVFAC ALONE WITH UPWARDS OF 55, SALARIES US\$150,000.00 OR \$450,000.00 LOCAL CURRENCY. ADD THE AMOUNTS SPENT BY NAVY PERSONNEL AND DEPENDENTS, ALONG WITH NAVFAC DIRECT PURCHASES, AND THE AMOUNT SOARS. OUR FILES HERE SHOW NUMEROUS EXAMPLES OF CONTINUING ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONTRIBUTIONS MADE BY THE FACILITIES, AS REFLECTED IN THE REFERENCE TO MINISTER WILLIAMS. WHENEVER THE GOA HAS A MAJOR ENGINEERING OR TECHNICAL PROBLEM, WITH LIMITED RESOURCES, IT LOOKS TO THE FACILITIES FOR IDEAS, PEOPLE, MACHINERY, OR OTHER ASSISTANCE. AS PARTIAL PREPARATION FOR ANY FAMILIARIZATION MEETING, THEY HAVE KEPT THE EMBASSY ADVISED OF THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS, AND THE GOA'S GRATITUDE. WHEN COMBINED WITH THE PEACE CORPS CONTRIBUTION ((33 VOLUNTEERS)), AND THE ONGOING TOURIST INDUSTRY, AND US INVESTMENTS, THE AMERICAN PRESENCE BOLSTERS THE ANTIGUAN ECONOMY.

CLOSING OF THE BASES WOULD PROVOKE AN ECONOMIC CRISIS WITH POLITICAL AND SOCIAL CONSEQUENCES. GOA WOULD BE FORCED INTO POTENTIAL DEFAULT ON ITS DEBTS, MOST OF WHICH ARE OWED TO USG OR PRIVATE US BANKS, AND BOTH US INVESTMENTS AND TOURISM WOULD BE JEOPARDIZED. CLEARLY, THEREFORE, USG HOLDS SUPERIOR POSITION AT BARGAINING TABLE.

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4. NOTWITHSTANDING FACT THAT GOA SELF-INTEREST DICTATES MAINTENANCE OF BASES, WE DO NOT HOWEVER BELIEVE USG SHOULD ENTER INTO SUBSEQUENT DISCUSSIONS WITH IDEA OF DRIVING AS HARD A BARGAIN AS POSSIBLE. THE MILITARY VALUE OF THE BASES APART, AND POLITICAL INTEREST IF THEY BECOME INDEPENDENT, IT IS IN OUR INTEREST TO COOPERATE WITH PRESENT GOA AND CLEARLY CONTRARY TO OUR INTEREST TO STRENGTHEN ANTIGUAN RADICAL FORCES AT ITS EXPENSE. FURTHERMORE, AS SUGGESTED ABOVE, WE DO HAVE ECONOMIC AND PRESUMABLY OTHER INTERESTS TO PROTECT.

WE ASSUME THAT BOTH STATE AND DOD ACCEPT PRINCIPLE THAT ANY NEW AGREEMENT MAY PROVIDE FOR PAYMENT BY USG OF RENT OR OTHER FORM OF REIMBURSEMENT. WE DO NOT KNOW WHAT FIGURE, IF ANY, HAS BEEN, OR WILL BE, CONSIDERED AS PAYMENT

WARRANTED, NOR HAS GOA EVER INDICATED WHAT IT WOULD REGARD AS APPROPRIATE FOR USE OF THE LAND. SOMETIME AGO, DOD APPROVED RELEASE OF CERTAIN LANDS TO GOA FOR OTHER PURPOSES. ONLY PART OF LAND, CURRENTLY HELD BY USG UNDER 1961 AGREEMENT, IS ACTUALLY IN USE.

5. I DID NOT CONCUR IN THE RELEASE, SENSING THAT THE GOA HAD NO REAL PLANS FOR ITS USE, AND THAT WE COULD BE COMPROMISING OUR FUTURE NEGOTIATING STANCE. AT THAT POINT, IT WAS STILL UNCLEAR TO ME AS A PROFESSIONAL REAL ESTATE APPRAISER WHETHER WE HAVE AN UP-TO-DATE SURVEY OF THE TOTAL LANDS, PLUS A BASIC ESTIMATE OF VALUE, IF USED FOR OTHER PURPOSES. I ALSO CONSIDERED THE REPRODUCTION COST OF THE IMPROVEMENTS ON THE LANDS. A DEEP INTEREST IN THIS PROCESS OF ARRIVING AT VALUE, WHATEVER THE PURPOSE, RUNS THROUGH MY SYSTEM. I WOULD BE REMISS IF I DID NOT RECALL FORMER BARBADOS' PRIME MINISTER BARROW'S OFF-HAND OBSERVATION THAT NAVFAC BARBADOS WOULD MAKE AN EXCELLENT POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE. THERE ARE ALWAYS ALTERNATIVE USES OF LAND AND BUILDINGS, FOR BOTH COMMERCIAL AND PUBLIC PURPOSES. TRANSLATED, IT SUGGESTS THAT, UNLESS WE HOLSTER OUR FRIENDLY ADVERSARIES WITH THE KIND OF WELL THOUGHT OUT, AND DESERVING CONSIDERATION, ON A VALUE-FOR-VALUE BASIS, THEY COULD SOLICIT, AND WELL CONSIDER OTHER OFFERS. HAVING SAID THIS, WE REMAIN CONVINCED WITHOUT UNDUE BIAS, THAT OUR CONTINUED PRESENCE IS PREFERRED BY THE ANTIGUANS.

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6. LASTLY, AS MAY BE SURMISED, I HAVE BOTH PROFESSIONAL AND DIPLOMATIC INTEREST IN THIS PROCESS ESPECIALLY THE LATTER, SINCE IT AFFECTS THREE SITES WITHIN POLITICAL ENTITIES COVERED BY MY ACCREDITATION.

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